DEVELOPING THE INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION FOR TEACHERS

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PREFACE

The Council of Europe has a long and well established tradition of influence on the aims and methods of language teaching. It has pursued through its publications the development of language teaching to meet the needs of the contemporary world. The most recent publications in this tradition are the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* providing guidelines for teaching, learning and assessment and the *European Language Portfolio* which allows learners to plan their learning, and chart and describe their proficiency as they progress through their language learning biography. There has also always been a concern to help teachers develop their theory and practice, for example by organising visits and exchanges to see work in other Council of Europe Member States or by publishing compendia which offer practical ideas for the classroom.

This publication continues that tradition of fostering new developments. Its origins within the Council of Europe can be traced to theoretical publications such as Byram and Zarate's "Definitions, objectives and assessment of sociocultural competence" in *Sociocultural competence in language learning and teaching* and accounts of teaching practices such as *The Sociocultural and Intercultural Dimension of Language Learning and Teaching,* both published in 1997.

Developing the Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching has been produced in a format which makes the issues accessible and deals with questions which teachers often ask. It answers those questions in both practical and principled ways, so that this publication does not just provide simple tips but allows teachers to think through the implications for their own classrooms of a substantial new dimension and aim in language teaching which is now firmly established.

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Introduction

It has been widely recognised in the language teaching profession that learners need not just knowledge and skill in the grammar of a language but also the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways. This was the major innovation of 'communicative language teaching'. At the same time, the 'communicative approach' introduced changes in methods of teaching, the materials used, the description of what is to be learnt and assessment of learning. The Council of Europe's 'Common European Framework of Reference' embodies these innovations and also emphasises the importance of 'intercultural awareness', 'intercultural skills', and 'existential competence' (see Appendix 1). The 'Common European Framework', like other recent publications, thus introduces the 'Intercultural Dimension' into the aims of language teaching. Its essence of is to help language learners to interact with speakers of other languages on equal terms, and to be aware of their own identities and those of their interlocutors. It is the hope that language learners who thus become 'intercultural speakers' will be successful not only in communicating information but also in developing a human relationship with people of other languages and cultures.

The purpose of this book is to make this new Intercultural Dimension easily accessible in practical ways to those teachers who want to know what it could mean in practice for them and their learners in their classrooms. It does not ignore the need to explain the ideas and the theory, but it ensures that the reader can see from the beginning what is involved in the Intercultural Dimension, and what they can do about it.

It is for this reason that we have written the text in the form of 'Frequently Asked Questions', the questions and problems which we have met when working with other teachers ourselves.

Secondly we have provided information about further sources of practical use, and examples of what other teachers have done to introduce an Intercultural Dimension into their work.

Above all, we want to demonstrate that an Intercultural Dimension does not mean yet another new method of language teaching but rather a natural extension of what most teachers recognise as important without reading lots of theory. What we offer here is simply a systematic overview and some practical advice.

1. What is 'the intercultural dimension' in language teaching?

When two people talk to each other, they do not just *speak* to the other to exchange information, they also *see* the other as an individual and as someone who belongs to a specific social group, for example a 'worker' and an 'employer' or a 'teacher' and a 'pupil'. This has an influence on what they say, how they say it, what response they expect and how they interpret the response. In other words, when people are talking to each other their **social identities** are unavoidably part of the social interaction between them. In language teaching, the concept of **'communicative competence'** takes this into account by emphasising that language learners need to acquire not just grammatical competence but also the knowledge of what is 'appropriate' language.

When two people in conversation are from different countries speaking in a language which is a foreign/second language for one of them, or when they are both speaking a language which is foreign to both of them, a **lingua franca** they may be acutely aware of their **national identities.** They are aware that at least one of them is speaking a foreign language and the other is hearing their own language being spoken by a foreigner. Often this influences what they say and how they say it because they see the other person as a representative of a country or nation. Yet this focus on national identity, and the accompanying risk of relying on **stereotypes**, reduces the individual from a complex human being to someone who is seen as representative of a country or 'culture'.

Furthermore, this simplification is reinforced if it is assumed that learning a language involves becoming like a person from another country. Often in language teaching the implicit aim has been to imitate a **native speaker** both in linguistic competence, in knowledge of what is 'appropriate' language, and in knowledge about a country and its 'culture'. The concept of 'culture' has changed over time from emphasis on literature, the arts and philosophy to culture as a shared way of life, but the idea of imitating the native speaker has not changed and consequently native speakers are considered to be experts and the models, and teachers who are native speakers are considered to be better than non-native speakers.

In contrast the **'intercultural dimension'** in language teaching aims to develop learners as **intercultural speakers** or **mediators** who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity. It is based on perceiving the interlocutor as an individual whose qualities are to be discovered, rather than as a representative of an externally ascribed identity. Intercultural communication is communication on the basis of respect for individuals and equality of human rights as the democratic basis for social interaction.

So language teaching with an intercultural dimension continues to help learners to acquire the **linguistic competence** needed to communicate in speaking or writing, to formulate what they want to say/write in correct and appropriate ways. But it also develops their **intercultural competence** i.e. their ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality.

Social identities are related to **cultures**. Someone who is 'Chinese' will have acquired that identity through being brought up surrounded by other Chinese, unconsciously learning their beliefs, values and behaviours. Similarly someone whose social identities include being 'a teacher' will have acquired the knowledge, values and behaviours they share with other teachers through a process of socialisation. But this is still a simplification because Chinese and teachers have many other identities and there are

many different ways of being Chinese or a teacher. So to see only one identity in a person is a simplification. An intercultural speaker is aware of this simplification, knows something about the beliefs, values and behaviours which are 'Chinese', but is also aware that there are other identities hidden in the person with whom they are interacting, even if they do not know what the associated beliefs, values and behaviours are.

Therefore an intercultural speaker needs some **knowledge**, about what it means to be Chinese or a teacher or indeed a Chinese teacher, for example. However, an intercultural speaker also needs an awareness that there is more to be known and understood from the other person's perspective, that there are **skills**, **attitudes** and **values** involved too (see following section), which are crucial to understanding intercultural human relationships. As a consequence, the **'best' teacher** is neither the native nor the non-native speaker, but the person who can help learners see relationships between their own and other cultures, can help them acquire interest in and curiosity about 'otherness', and an awareness of themselves and their own cultures seen from other people's perspectives.

Thus, developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching involves recognising that the aims are: to give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence; to prepare them for interaction with people of other cultures; to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviours; and to help them to see that such interaction is an enriching experience.

2. What knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are involved in intercultural competence and what is the relevant importance of each?

The acquisition of intercultural competence is never complete and perfect, but *to be a successful intercultural speaker and mediator does not require complete and perfect competence*. The first reason for this is the more obvious: it is not possible to acquire or to anticipate all the knowledge one might need in interacting with people of other cultures. Those cultures are themselves constantly changing; one cannot know with whom one will use a specific language since many languages are spoken in more than one country. Similarly there are in any one country many different cultures and languages. And thirdly any language can be used as a lingua franca with anyone from any country. So it is not possible to anticipate the knowledge language learners need and this has been the main failure of the emphasis on knowledge in *civilisation*, *Landeskunde* etc, because whatever is taught it is inevitably insufficient.

The second reason why complete and perfect competence is not required is less obvious but just as important: everyone's own social identities and values develop, everyone acquires new ones throughout life as they become a member of new social groups; and those identities, and the values, beliefs and behaviours they symbolise are deeply embedded in one's self. This means that meeting new experience, seeing unexpected beliefs, values and behaviours, can often shock and disturb those deeply embedded identities and values, however open, tolerant and flexible one wishes to be. Everyone has therefore to be constantly aware of the need to adjust, to accept and to understand other people - it is never a completed process.

This also means that there is no perfect 'model' to imitate, no equivalent of the notion of a perfect 'native speaker'. There is no question, either, of expecting learners to imitate or attempt to acquire the social identity of a native speaker, such as a new national identity.

The **components of intercultural competence** are knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds because of one's belonging to a number of social groups. These values are part of one's social identities.

The foundation of intercultural competence is in the **attitudes** of the intercultural speaker and mediator:

Intercultural attitudes (savoir être): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own

This means a willingness to relativise one's own values, beliefs and behaviours, not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones, and to be able to see how they might look from an outsider's perspective who has a different set of values, beliefs and behaviours. This can be called the ability to 'decentre'.

Another crucial factor is **knowledge**, not primarily knowledge about a specific culture, but rather knowledge of how social groups and identities function and what is involved in intercultural interaction. If it can be anticipated with whom one will interact, then knowledge of that person's world is useful. If it cannot, then it is useful to imagine an interlocutor in order to have an example - a specific country or countries and their

social groups - to understand what it means to know something about other people with other multiple identities:

Knowledge (savoirs): of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction

So knowledge can be defined as having two major components: knowledge of social processes, and knowledge of illustrations of those processes and products; the latter includes knowledge about how other people are likely to perceive you, as well as some knowledge about other people.

No teacher can have or anticipate all the knowledge which learners might at some point need. Indeed many teachers have not had the opportunity themselves to experience all or any of the cultures which their learners might encounter, but this is not crucial. The teacher's task is to develop attitudes and skills as much as knowledge, and teachers can acquire information about other countries together with their learners; they do not need to be the sole or major source of information. **Skills** are just as important as attitudes and knowledge, and teachers can concentrate as much on skills as upon knowledge.

Because intercultural speakers/mediators need to be able to see how misunderstandings can arise, and how they might be able to resolve them, they need the attitudes of decentring but also the skills of comparing. By putting ideas, events, documents from two or more cultures side by side and seeing how each might look from the other perspective, intercultural speakers/mediators can see how people might misunderstand what is said or written or done by someone with a different social identity. The *skills of comparison, of interpreting and relating*, are therefore crucial:

Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre): ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own

Secondly, because neither intercultural speakers/mediators nor their teachers can anticipate all their knowledge needs, it is equally important to acquire the skills of finding out new knowledge and integrating it with what they already have. They need especially to know how to ask people from other cultures about their beliefs, values and behaviours, which because they are often unconscious, those people cannot easily explain. So intercultural speakers/mediators need *skills of discovery and interaction*:

Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire): ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

Finally, however open towards, curious about and tolerant of other people's beliefs, values and behaviours learners are, their own beliefs, values and behaviours are deeply embedded and can create reaction and rejection. Because of this unavoidable response, intercultural speakers/mediators need to become aware of their own **values** and how these influence their views of other people's values. Intercultural speakers/mediators need a critical awareness of themselves and their values, as well as those of other people:

Critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager): an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries

It is not the purpose of teaching to try to change learners values, but to make them explicit and conscious in any evaluative response to others.

There is nonetheless a fundamental values position which all language teaching should promote: a position which *acknowledges respect for human dignity and equality of human rights as the democratic basis for social interaction.*

The role of the language teacher is therefore to develop skills, attitudes and awareness of values just as much as to develop a knowledge of a particular culture or country.

3. How do I teach the intercultural dimension if I have never left my country?

"Being exposed to the target culture is an absolute must for any learner/teacher. How can a person acquire the competence.....?" This is the question which many teachers ask and if they have no opportunity to leave their own country and visit one where the target language is spoken they do not see how they can teach 'the target culture'.

The first response to this is to say that the main aim of teaching the intercultural dimension is **not the transmission of information about a foreign country**. The intercultural dimension is concerned with

- helping learners to understand how intercultural interaction takes place,
- how social identities are part of all interaction,
- how their perceptions of other people and others people's perceptions of them influence the success of communication
- how they can find out for themselves more about the people with whom they are communicating.

So **a teacher does not have to know everything** about 'the target culture'. This is in any case impossible and in fact there are many cultures associated with a particular language, for example many countries where French is spoken as the first language, and within those countries many variations on beliefs, values and behaviours which people share, in other words many cultures.

So a teacher should try to design a series of activities to enable learners to discuss and draw conclusions from their own experience of the target culture solely as a result of what they have heard or read. The teacher might provide some factual information related to the life-styles current in the culture(s) and patterns usually followed by members of these cultures, but the important thing is to encourage comparative analysis with learners' own culture. For example, foreigners' views about the learners' country as represented in travel guides or in tourist brochures might be compared with the learners' own experience of and views about their own country; they will quickly discover there is a difference. They can then be asked to think whether their perceptions of the foreign country will be the same as those of the inhabitants themselves.

The methods of doing this can include simulations and role-play which will activate their schemata and background knowledge about other countries and cultures: learners act the role of visitors to their own country and meet with other learners acting as themselves and not as the stereotypes that the visitors are expecting. This kind of **experiential learning** is powerful in developing self-awareness as well as perceptions of other countries. The teacher can encourage learners to become more observant in terms of various subtleties of cultural behaviour. Learners are sure to emerge out of these experiences much better prepared to communicate with other intercultural speakers, tolerate the differences and handle everyday situations they are likely to encounter in a foreign country.

There is in this kind of work no need for the teacher to be an expert about other countries. The focus is on **how learners respond to others** and others' views of themselves, and how they interact with people from other cultures.

Of course, there is some factual information which learners need about other countries where the target language is spoken, but this is available to teachers in reference books, through the internet and so on. This kind of information does not depend on having been to the countries in question, and in fact when one does visit another country it is not this kind of information that one acquires. In this respect the issue of cross-curricular dimension comes into focus to highlight the point that intercultural education need not be linked to language alone, but can extend to the exchange of information/experience on content subjects across the curriculum.

The **choice of topics** for comparative study is therefore partly determined by learners' existing perceptions of other countries and cultures, not by some pre-determined syllabus which is supposed to represent the 'correct' view of another country. This means that no curriculum for language education should or could be transposed directly from one national system to another. This is especially true about the cultural curriculum which should be set from within the particular educational system and, in particular, should not reflect the intentions of one or more of the target cultures. The use of books produced in the countries in question is therefore not necessarily the best way to develop a syllabus and a choice of topics.

There is a danger of culture being limited to the all-too-familiar stereotypical icons of the target culture – the instantly recognisable pictures of the clichéd sights mentioned in a popular guide book. There is also a danger of believing that there is one authoritative account of another country and its cultures, that there is a 'real' account which only the native speaker can know.

The question is often asked "Can an 'outsider' know the 'national identity' of a country from a cross-cultural perspective, will the way one nation imagines the other from a distance be adequate?" The response to this is that the outsider's understanding of (a part of) another country's identities and cultures is just as valid as that of an insider. Of course, teachers have to simplify to match their learners' language level or their stage of intellectual development, but this can be overcome by returning to the same topics at a later stage with more subtle and complex materials.

Where direct encounters with a foreign culture are not available for either teacher or learners, the important issue is to prepare learners for asking questions of the appropriate kind. There may be people from one of the countries in question ready to talk with learners but the important thing is not for them to ask questions about facts, but about how the person perceives the learners' country and why they have these perceptions, before going on to asking about the target country. In this way, learners can be come aware of the power of perceptions.

The teacher does not need to have experience or be an expert on the country. The teacher's task is to help learners ask questions, and to interpret answers.

4. Do I need to be a native speaker?

The concept of the native speaker is used primarily with respect to linguistic competence. It is argued that the native speaker 'knows' the language of a country intuitively and is an **authority on the language** in a way which a non-native speaker can never hope to attain. There can be debate about this view of the native speaker as an authority whom learners must try to imitate even though they can never quite reach the same level of intuitive knowledge. Whatever the merits of this view, however, it **cannot be transferred to the culture(s) of a country**, for two main reasons:
- people who live in a particular country do not know intuitively or otherwise the whole of 'the culture' of that country because there are in fact **many cultures within a country**
- unlike language which is largely acquired by the age of 5, **cultural learning goes on throughout life** as individuals pass from one section of a society to another or from one social group to another, or as they move into new social groups each with their own beliefs, values and behaviours, i.e. their own culture.

So an individual native speaker cannot be an authority on the cultures of a country and cannot give authoritative views on what is 'right' or 'wrong' as might be possible with language.

Furthermore, intercultural competence is only partially a question of knowledge, and it is the other dimensions (savoir être, savoir apprendre/faire, savoir comprendre and savoir s'engager) which must be given importance in the teaching and learning process. These savoirs are however not automatically acquired by the native speaker since they focus on how people interact with other cultures. So a native speaker who has never ventured out of their country or even out of their restricted local society, does not have these other savoirs which are crucial to intercultural competence.

What the teacher should ask is **not how much more information** about a country and its cultures can I include in the syllabus, but **how can I develop those other competences** which will help learners to interact successfully with people of other cultures and identities.

There is therefore a shift from the information based approach to an approach which involves analysing cultural products. This has an advantage of **teaching analytical skills** which are much less 'perishable' than just facts, and which are flexible enough to keep up with constant cultural change, and can be applied to a wide range of 'cultural products'. Thus information only becomes 'food for thought' whose importance may be temporary and transitory. Learners gain the tools which can be recycled, and get the best of both worlds.

So the non-native teacher and learner have the **advantage of seeing a culture from a distance**, and then taking the perspective of that other culture to look back on their own. In other words, the insider, someone who belongs to a culture, is very often unable to analyse and conceptualise what is too familiar, *"they can't see the wood for the trees"*. With all the wealth of experience of the national culture they grew up in, much of what they know is unconscious and incomplete, not to mention the fact that a person normally belongs to only one out of many subcultures that each national culture encompasses.

Thus, a non-native speaker inferiority complex is only the result of misunderstanding and prejudice. What is more important than native speaker knowledge is an ability to analyse and specific training in systemic cultural analysis is an important aid in becoming a foreign language teacher, regardless of the teacher's mother-tongue. This is not to deny the importance of linguistic

competence and it may be important to follow the authority of the native speaker in linguistic competence, but intercultural competence is a quite different matter.

5. How do I use a study visit or exchange?

Intercultural competence involves attitudes, knowledge, skills and values (see 2). Language teaching classrooms are usually places where knowledge and skills are the focus, and where attitude change or re-consideration of values happen only incidentally. Attitudes and values are not usually the focus of teachers' planning or the explicit objectives of a lesson and there is very little pedagogical theory to help teachers plan for the affective aspect of learners' development. In a study visit or exchange however, it is the affective aspect of the experience which is likely to be the most important. Learners experience some degree of **'culture shock'**. Young children can feel homesick and even physically ill as a consequence of suddenly being in an entirely unfamiliar environment - and so can adults!

So teachers have a responsibility to prepare for this reaction, and to take advantage of the opportunity it gives to help learners to decentre, *to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange*. In other words, the study visit or exchange is an opportunity to promote **savoir être**. This is best done through **experiential learning**, where learners can experience situations which make demands upon their emotions and feelings and then reflect upon that experience and its meaning for them, thus combining the affective and the cognitive. The teacher's role is to structure the learning experience, to ensure that the 'culture shock' is productive and positive, and not overwhelming and negative, and to help learners to analyse and learn from their responses to a new environment.

The major opportunity offered by the study visit or exchange is the development of the skills involved in the 'discovery' of a new environment, **savoir apprendre**. Learners can be trained in simple or complex skills, depending on their maturity and language skills, with which they can investigate the environment, look for what is unfamiliar and for explanations which help them to understand. The explanations may come from analysis of documents or from interviewing, formally or informally, those who live in that environment. This is also the opportunity for **cooperation with teachers of other subjects**, especially geography, history, and other social and human sciences, since learners acquire skills of social investigation in those subjects too: doing surveys, analysing statistics, reading historical and contemporary texts, both factual and fictional.

It is important to remember that there are **three phases** for any study visit or exchange:
- in the **preparatory phase**, learners need to externalise their thoughts, anxieties and excitements about their visit. For example, ask everyone in a class to stand around a very large piece of paper and write or draw the first thing that comes into their mind when they think about the place they are going to. Later they can look back at this and compare and contrast expectation and experience, but it also helps the teacher to know during this preparatory phase learners' starting point
- in the **fieldwork phase**, learners are surrounded by and immersed in a new environment and learn consciously and unconsciously through all the senses. There should however be opportunity for withdrawal from the demands of being in a new environment, an opportunity for reflection alone and together with others. Learners should keep a diary as a safe metaphorical 'room' where they can express feelings and reactions. They should also be brought into a 'classroom' atmosphere with their teachers so that each individual can compare and contrast their experience and interpretation of it with that of others, and their teachers can help them with

misunderstandings or other problems. This has to be done during the visit because the emotional involvement is very deep and needs to be handled immediately
- in the **follow-up phase**, after return home, the emphasis should be on further reflection on individuals' experience during the visit and, by sharing and comparing, on an attempt to analyse and conceptualise what has been experienced as a basis for understanding (some aspects of) the other environment and the people who live there. One very effective way of doing this is for them to prepare a presentation of their visit - both a factual account and their reactions and interpretations - to friends and family. This obliges them to de-centre, to take the perspective of their audience and think about what they need to explain to those who do not know.

Much of this work can be done with the aid of **visual representations** because this removes the constraints of foreign and first language in expressing what is unfamiliar. Learners can draw, take photographs, make diagrams to capture experience and to express their feelings.

It is also important to remember that, for many children, and also some adults, the study visit or exchange is the first time that they leave home, live with someone not of their family - even though they may have known them as classmates - and have to be independent. The 'shock' may be more than the new environment. It may be in part the effect of **living in a group**, and although this is an issue which all teachers leading school groups have to meet, the responsibility for language teachers is heightened by the travel 'abroad'.

The visit or exchange is much more than an opportunity to 'practice' the language learnt in the classroom. It is a holistic learning experience which provides the means of using intercultural skills and acquiring new attitudes and values. Language practice may be limited, especially on a visit rather than an exchange, and the acquisition of knowledge about another country may be minimal, but this does not matter. If teachers create a pedagogical structure in three phases, learners can profit from a visit or exchange in ways which are scarcely possible in the classroom. Teachers need clear objectives, methods which take into account the power of experiential learning, and then learners will 'make the strange familiar - and the familiar strange'

6. How can I promote the intercultural dimension if I have to follow a set curriculum or programme of study and teach grammar?

The set programme of study is likely to be based on **themes** as well as grammatical structures. Textbooks can be presented in a way that suggests that the materials are authoritative and definitive or in an **intercultural and critical perspective**. When developing intercultural skills, teachers can start from the theme and content in the text-book, and then encourage learners to ask further questions and make comparisons.

Themes treated in text-books can lend themselves to development in an intercultural and critical perspective. The key principle is to get learners to **compare** the theme in a familiar situation with examples from an unfamiliar context.

For instance the theme of sport can be examined from many perspectives, including:

- Gender – are there sports that are, in the familiar context or in the unfamiliar context, predominantly played by men or by women? Are things changing?
- Age – are there sports for younger people and older people?
- Region – are there local sports? Do people, including the learners, identify with local teams? Do some teams have a particular cultural tradition?
- Religion – are there religious objections to playing sport, or days when some people choose not to do sport because of religious observance?
- Racism – is this found in spectator sports? are the players of foreign teams, or foreign players in local teams always treated with respect? Are there incidents of racist chants or insults?

Other themes e.g. food, homes, school, tourism, leisure, can receive a similarly critical perspective.

Grammatical exercises can **reinforce prejudice and stereotypes or challenge them**. For instance female subjects may be linked to stereotypically female activities or actions (Mary likes cooking; John likes football); stereotyping generalisations may be encouraged about groups (The French like…; Germans are…..; Older people…..). Teachers can encourage learners to comment on such statements and challenge them.

Similar exercises can be proposed, which include a broader view of culture (e.g. use a wider range of names; include activities more likely to be enjoyed by minority groups, or clothes worn by minorities; include a wide range of names of countries and peoples, not just European and North American).

Starting from the exercises proposed by the text-book, **learners can devise further exercises**, reinforcing the same grammatical structures, but using a different range of contexts and examples. They can then swap exercises and work on examples provided by other learners.

One important contribution to an intercultural perspective is the inclusion of **vocabulary that helps learners talk about cultural diversity**. This can include terms such as: human rights; equality; dignity; gender; bias; prejudice; stereotype; racism; ethnic minority; and the names of ethnic groups, including white groups.

A set curriculum or programme of study can be modified and challenged by simple techniques which make learners aware of the implicit values and meanings in the material they are using.

7. What materials do I need to promote the intercultural dimension?

Textbooks can be written in an **intercultural and critical perspective** or in a way that suggests that the materials are **authoritative**. If there is a choice of text-book, one with this critical perspective is preferable.

For instance, the introduction to a textbook on British Cultural Studies produced in Romania describes the expectations of the authors for the learner:

> This book is less concerned about making you learn information by heart than with encouraging you to *process* the information contained here. For example, in the class on Scotland you are asked to *compare* what a Scottish person says about Scotland and what a compilation from reference books says about Scotland. You do not have to learn one or the other, but you do have to learn the process of comparison. The same process of comparison of different kinds of information takes place in many classes. In others, you are asked to *apply* concepts such as 'gender' or 'nation as imagined community' in your analyses of society. In short, what we want is to provide you with the skills to *argue* …not learn by heart (Chichirdan et al., 1998:10).

Sources of information used in this approach are **authentic texts**, including audio recordings and a variety of written documents and visuals such as maps, photographs, diagrams and cartoons. The activities involve **understanding, discussing and writing** in the target language. The **approach to the materials is always critical**. There is every reason for applying such principles to all topics studied in the target language. It is a question of challenging the reader by bringing together texts and visual materials which present **contrasting views**. Learners need to acquire **concepts for analysing texts** more than factual information.

However, if a textbook presents a single perspective, then teachers can suggest that other perspectives are also possible and legitimate. One way of doing this is to find or encourage learners to find additional authentic materials which present a different view. The **Internet** is a rich source for this. For instance learners can find newspapers with different political or cultural perspectives and campaigning material from a variety of organisations.

In any case, authentic materials should be presented **in their context**, or ensure that the text-book does this. It is important for learners to know **information about a text** or document such as the following:

Context, e.g. date the text was produced; the type of publication; the place where it was produced; the intended readership or audience; significant external events that influenced its production or may have been in the minds of readers/ listeners; likely political, religious or cultural viewpoint;
Intention e.g. to persuade, to argue, to entertain, to sell something (advertisements).

Learners can be encouraged to **examine the textbook critically**, including cartoons, photographs and other non-print material it may contain. They can also be encouraged

to look for similar texts or other items from their familiar culture and compare and contrast them.

It is important to use authentic material but to ensure that learners understand its context and intention. Materials from different origins with different perspectives should be used together to enable learners to compare and to analyse the materials critically. It is more important that learners acquire skills of analysis than factual information.

8. How does it affect teaching and learning styles?

Promoting the intercultural dimension requires a framework of accepted classroom procedures that allows for the **expression of and recognition of cultural difference**. These procedures should be **based on human rights** – equal dignity and equal rights. They should be explicit and discussed with and **agreed by the group.**

Procedural ground rules need to be established and adopted for discussion and debate in class. Whether the context is pair work, group work or whole class discussions, agreements such as the following apply:

- Participants are expected to listen to each other and take turns.
- Where a discussion is chaired, the authority of the chair is respected.
- Even heated debates must be conducted in polite language.
- Discriminatory remarks, particularly racist, sexist and homophobic discourse and expressions are totally unacceptable at any time.
- Participants show respect when commenting on and describing people portrayed in visuals or texts.
- All involved have the responsibility to challenge stereotypes.
- A respectful tone is required at all times.

It goes without saying that, **teachers are party to these agreements** and will not use sarcasm, irony and disparaging judgements.

Learners and teachers will expect to examine and **challenge generalisations or stereotypes**, and suggest or present other viewpoints. This is an essential part of developing intercultural competence.

In oral work, learners can expect to discuss in pairs and small groups, as well as in plenary. They should have **opportunities for making a personal response** to images, stories, case-studies and other materials.

Tasks set should be carefully formulated and include **explorations of opinion gaps** as well as information gaps. Learners bring considerable knowledge of their familiar culture and some knowledge of cultures being studied. However, they do not necessarily share the same knowledge, the same values or the same opinions. Language learning to promote an intercultural dimension encourages a **sharing of knowledge and a discussion of values and opinions**. Many intercultural and antiracist educational programmes, such as the Council of Europe's *All Different, All Equal* campaign, are based on the principle of peer education. That means that learners learn from each other as much as from the teacher or text-book.

An intercultural dimension involves learners in sharing their knowledge with each other and discussing their opinions. There need to be agreed rules for such discussions based on an understanding of human rights and respect for others. Learners thus learn as much from each other as from the teacher, comparing their own cultural context with the unfamiliar contexts to which language learning introduces them.

9. How do I deal with learners' stereotypes and prejudices?

Research suggests that overcoming prejudice is a top **priority for language teachers**.

Stereotyping involves **labelling or categorising** particular groups of people, usually in a negative way, according to preconceived ideas or broad generalisations about them – and then **assuming that all members of that group will think and behave identically**. Stereotypes can undermine our sense of who we are by suggesting that how we look or speak determines how we act.

Prejudice occurs when someone pre-judges a particular group or individual based on their own stereotypical assumptions or ignorance.

Since stereotypes and prejudices are based on **feelings rather than reason**, it is important to have opportunities to explore feelings as well as thoughts. This implies careful classroom management to ensure conflicts of views are productive and not destructive. In particular it is important to **challenge ideas, not the people** who express the ideas.

Material in **text books** or, indeed, **examinations** may contain stereotypes of ethnic minorities, for example. One response lies in the development of skills of critical discourse analysis and critical cultural awareness.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) studies the way text and talk may reproduce or resist racism, abuse of social power, dominance and inequality. It looks at texts and talk in the social and political context. CDA can provide a set of **guidelines for interrogating an authentic text**, so that learners engage with the content critically at the same time as they attempt to understand other more superficial aspects of the text. For instance, learners may confront texts of a possibly xenophobic nature to explore the discourse mechanisms of racism.

As an example, learners of Spanish studied newspaper articles on the theme of immigration. They were asked to closely examine the texts looking for certain **discourse features** such as the following:

- Sources, perspectives, arguments.

Are they institutional? From the majority group? Do minority perspectives find expression? Are the sources of evidence made explicit?

- Vocabulary, connotations, names

Different words for 'immigrants'. Different descriptors.

- Implications and presuppositions

e.g. 'the best antidote against immigration is…' implies that immigration is a social illness against which society has to fight.

- Extrapolation of statistics

e.g. 'by 2010 there will be…'

- Active and passive constructions

e.g. '32 immigrants deported to Africa' - no mention of who was responsible.

- Rhetorical expressions

Metaphors and similes: 'Fortress Europe'; 'an avalanche of immigrants'.

- Us versus them
  our democracy, our jobs, their religion, their culture.

Having made this critical analysis of the linguistic and stylistic features of the press coverage of immigration, learners felt confident to discuss the issue and to make comparisons with coverage in their own national and local press. They then wrote an account of their findings and their feelings about them.

Learners can acquire the skills of critical analysis of stereotypes and prejudice in texts and images they read or see. Their own prejudices and stereotypes are based on feelings rather than thoughts and need to be challenged, but teachers need to ensure that the ideas are challenged not the person, if the effect is to be positive.

10. How do I assess intercultural competence?

There are many kinds of **assessment** of which testing is just one. **Tests** too are of many kinds and serve many functions - diagnosis, placement on courses, achievement, proficiency for example - but are often associated with examinations and certification. **Examinations** and certification are highly sensitive issues to which politicians, parents and learners pay much attention. As a consequence, the examination of learners' competence has to be very careful and as 'objective' - meaning valid and reliable - as possible.

It seems not difficult to **assess learners' acquisition of information**. There can be simple tests of facts, but the difficulty comes in deciding which facts are important. Shall they, for example, learn 'facts' about social etiquette and politeness in a particular country? But then whose social etiquette, that of the dominant social class, or that of the social class or ethnic group or gender group to which they belong? Shall they learn historical 'facts', but whose version of history?

It is also possible to **assess learners' knowledge and understanding**. In the teaching of history for example, rather than testing recall of historical 'facts', historical understanding and sensitivity is assessed in essays where learners discuss events. A similar approach is familiar to many language teachers who have also been learners or teachers of literature, where the testing of recall of literary history or plots of novels has largely given way to assessment of critical understanding of and sensitivity towards literary texts.

The problem lies however in the fact that knowledge and understanding are only part of intercultural competence (**savoirs** and **savoir comprendre**). Assessing knowledge is thus only a small part of what is involved. What we need is to **assess ability to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange (savoir être)**, to step outside their taken for granted perspectives, and to **act on a the basis of new perspectives (savoir s'engager)**.

Most difficult of all is to assess whether learners have changed their attitudes, become more tolerant of difference and the unfamiliar. This is affective and moral development and it can be argued that even if we can test it, we should not be trying to quantify tolerance. But quantification is only one kind of assessment. If however, **assessment is not in terms of tests and traditional examinations**, but rather in terms of producing **a record of learners' competences**, then a portfolio approach is possible and in fact desirable.

The **Council of Europe** has developed a **European Language Portfolio**.

It has three parts:

· the **Passport** section provides an overview of the individual's proficiency in different languages at a given point in time; the overview is defined in terms of skills and the common reference levels in the Common European Framework.

· The **Language Biography** facilitates the learner's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress; it encourages the learner to state what he/she can do in each language and to include information on linguistic and cultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts; it is organised to promote plurilingualism i.e. the development of competencies in a number of languages.

· The **Dossier** offers the learner the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the Language Biography or Passport.

So the portfolio introduces the notion of self-assessment which is considered significant both as a means of recording what has been experienced and learnt, and as a means of making learners become more conscious of their learning and of the abilities they already have.

The language biography can therefore include self assessment of intercultural competence. Here are two examples of proformas for self-assessment for older learners. Versions for younger learners would need a different formulation but could follow the same principles i.e. to formulate the different aspects of intercultural competence in the learners' ways of thinking and talking about their learning experiences:

A record of my Intercultural Experience

- in language: *(learner inserts language)*
- place, period of time, age:

A. *Feelings*
Ways in which my curiosity and interest were aroused:
(examples from ordinary daily life, especially when they made me re-consider my own culture)

Periods when I felt uncomfortable/homesick
(what made me feel like this, with particular examples if possible)

Periods when I felt at home and comfortable
(what made me feel like this, with particular examples if possible)

B. *Knowledge*
The most important things I learnt about family life and/or life at school

The most important things I have learnt about the country, the nation, the state where I stayed - in the present and in its past

What I have learnt about customs and conventions of talking with people (topics which interest them, topics to avoid, how to greet people and take leave from them)

C. *Actions*
Incidents or problems which I resolved by explaining different cultures to people, helping them see the points of view of different cultures and how misunderstandings can happen.

Examples of times when I have had to ask questions and work out my own answers (from 'asking the way' to understanding cultural customs and beliefs)

A self-assessment of my Intercultural Experience

A. *Interest in other people's way of life*
I am interested in other people's experience of daily life, particularly those things not usually presented to outsiders through the media.
Example:

I am also interested in the daily experience of a variety of social groups within a society and not only the dominant culture.
Example:

B. *Ability to change perspective*
I have realised that I can understand other cultures by seeing things from a different point of view and by looking at my culture from their perspective.
Example:

C. *Ability to cope with living in a different culture*
I am able to cope with a range of reactions I have to living in a different culture (euphoria, homesickness, physical and mental discomfort etc)
Example:

D. *Knowledge about another country and culture*
I know some important facts about living in the other culture and about the country, state and people.
Example:

I know how to engage in conversation with people of the other culture and maintain a conversation
Example:

E. *Knowledge about intercultural communication*
I know how to resolve misunderstandings which arise from people's lack of awareness of the view point of another culture
Example:

I know how to discover new information and new aspects of the other culture for myself
Example:

The role of assessment is therefore to encourage learners' awareness of their own abilities in intercultural competence, and to help them realise that these abilities are acquired in many different circumstances inside and outside the classroom.

11. Do I need specific training?

The importance of the intercultural dimension is that it is a vision of language teaching and learning which is goes beyond the concept of language learning as just acquiring skills in a language, accompanied by some knowledge about a country where the language is spoken. Intercultural competence is different from factual knowledge about another country. So along with the linguistic competence teachers should be able to develop in their learners the intercultural competence which enables them to interact with people of different cultural backgrounds, multiple identities and a specific individuality.

This has a lot of implications for the priorities in teacher training. . However, even if the curriculum for initial teacher education institutions is revised (which will certainly take time), many parents, learners, teachers, and other professionals feel the need to change the ways of teaching/learning now. The question teachers ask themselves is: "How can a conscientious teacher keep a sense of direction and survive in a situation when you have to do both – teaching and learning?"

The issues which need to be given **priority** are not the acquisition of more knowledge about a country or countries, but **how to organise the classroom and classroom processes** to enable learners to develop new attitudes (savoir être), new skills (savoir apprendre/faire and savoir comprendre) and new critical awareness (savoir s'engager).

Priority 1
Developing skills of **group communication** and group work in the classroom: this includes knowing how to set procedural ground-rules and determine ways in which learners can make personal responses - not just acquire skills and information (see Question 8 above). In some countries this is familiar territory for teachers of social studies/citizenship education and similar subjects, and language teachers can learn from them. In other countries, there has been a lack of this kind of pedagogy throughout the last 70-80 years, and there is a need for innovation and experimentation which will not always be easily accepted, although experiments which have been carried out show that young people are very open to this kind of pedagogy.

Teachers will need to seek **new kinds of materials** which allow learners to explore and analyse them rather than learn the information in them. Sources include the internet where it is available. Where it is not, a challenging way of obtaining materials is to have an exchange by post with a school in another country, where for example learners choose a topic and put real objects which they think will explain the topic - accompanied by comments written carefully to suit the language level of the recipients. The class can be in a country other than a target language country, provided the learners are learning the same foreign language.

Thus even if teachers' own knowledge might be limited, their proper role is not to impart facts, but **help learners to attain the skills** that are necessary to make sense out of the facts they themselves **discover** in their study of the target culture.

Classroom procedures of team-building and project work are some of the important features of teacher education, for the objectives that are to be achieved in intercultural understanding involve **processes rather than facts**.

Priority 2

Since the focus is on processes and some of these involve the learners in taking risks by talking about their attitudes and views, teachers may need more opportunities to discuss psychological **self-awareness and awareness of others**. Teaching for intercultural competence involves dealing with learners' attitudes, emotions, beliefs and values. This does not imply that foreign language teachers should aim at becoming psychologists, but they should try to acquire the basic **principles of teaching when emotions and risk-taking are involved**. This may be a new area to language teachers who traditionally focus on cognitive knowledge and skills but in some countries there are other teachers who are more accustomed to this. Co-operation with such teachers or group discussions among language teachers themselves can be very helpful. It is not question of taking a course in psychology.

Priority 3
Taking part in international projects, professional associations, governmental initiatives, exchanges will promote all the aspects of intercultural dimension in language teaching. Such experience involves teachers in being intercultural learners themselves, in taking risks, analysing and reflecting on their own experience and learning - and drawing consequences from this for their work as teachers.

International projects are sponsored by the Council of Europe, in workshops in the European Centre for Modern Languages, and by other national and international institutions, including the European Union. The value of being involved in professional networks of this kind is as much in the experience of working with people of other professional, cultural and national identities as in the products and information acquired. Teacher should see this work as significant in their professional development.

What language teachers need for the intercultural dimension is not more knowledge of other countries and cultures, but skills in promoting an atmosphere in the classroom which allows learners to take risks in their thinking and feeling. Such skills are best developed in practice and in reflection on experience. They may find common ground in this with teachers of other subjects and/or in taking part themselves in learning experiences which involve risk and reflection.

12. How do I overcome my own stereotypes and misconceptions?

Teachers are not just professionals but also human beings with their own experiences and histories through which they may have acquired prejudices and stereotypes about other cultures and peoples just like any other human being. We are not always conscious of these feelings and how we express them, but a brief remark in the classroom is often remembered by learners for many years afterwards.

These remarks may be **negative or positive**. Some teachers are positively prejudiced about the countries where their target language is spoken and wish to pass this enthusiasm on to their learners. This might seen to be the role of the teacher but it is debatable whether teachers should try **to influence attitudes** or not. So this is one of the first issues teachers need to think about. The response to this problem may be different in different countries according to their education traditions. In some countries teachers believe that they should not attempt to influence attitudes towards other countries and in fact should be careful only to deal with the cognitive dimension of learning. Teachers in other countries may feel that it is part of their pedagogical responsibility to influence attitudes. Neither of these positions excludes the development of *savoir être* because this is not a question of developing particular positive (or indeed negative) attitudes towards a country or people but rather of creating curiosity and a sense of openness.

Although in Question 9 it was suggested that teachers should attempt to break down learners' stereotypes and prejudices, there may be a need to include stereotypes in the materials so that the apparent usefulness of stereotypes can be addressed. Stereotypes operate on a different level to other kinds of knowledge: they simplify and they allow people to act quickly. People can make judgments and act upon them quickly if they use stereotypes whatever the context, not just in connection with other countries. This makes them **attractive but deceptive**. Knowledge of a more differentiated and accurate kind depends on recognising the variation in people, but this requires more effort and is easily avoided.

This is by no means to say that we can do without any stereotypes at all in foreign language teaching – after all identities are often defined in stereotypes, even by people defining themselves! The way one nation sees another is at least partly dependent on how it thinks about itself. Stereotypes are there to be challenged, for this is the only way to develop an individual who is ready to discover the essence of “others” in members of other cultures and understand the complexity they embody.

On the other hand, it is inevitable and proper that learners have views on other cultures and the values, beliefs and behaviours they embody. The question for teachers is how they respond to learners' views. Do they take a neutral position? Do they take a clear and explicit position in favour of the values in other cultures which their learners may reject? Do they allow learners' views to go unchallenged?

The concept of *savoir s'engager* suggests that teachers should first challenge learners to make explicit the basis on which they make judgements about others, and to encourage them to be aware of the culturally-determined nature of their basis for making judgements. This not the same as challenging and criticising learners' beliefs and basis for judgement about other cultures. It is simply an encouragement to them to see how others might consider their position, whether it is religious, secular, ethical, philosophical or pragmatic.

The consequence for teachers is that they need to be aware of and decide consciously about the issues raised by their own feelings about their languages and associated cultures. Do they wish to influence their learners' attitudes? Do they wish to take a neutral position? Do they challenge their learners to make their own position explicit and if so how?

Teachers cannot be neutral on cultural issues since they respond to other cultures as human beings and not just as language teachers. They need therefore to consider how their own stereotypes and prejudices may influence their teaching subconsciously, and what the effects of this may be on learners. They also need to reflect upon how they respond to and challenge their learners' prejudices not only as teachers but also as human beings subconsciously influenced by their experience of otherness.

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Appendix

Extracts from the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment.*
Published by: Cambridge University Press and Council of Europe, Cambridge, 2001.
On-line at the Council of Europe Modern Languages Division website: http://culture.coe.fr/lang

Intercultural awareness

Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community' produce an intercultural awareness. It is, of course, important to note that intercultural awareness includes an awareness of the regional and social diversity of both worlds. It is also enriched by awareness of a wider range of cultures than those carried by the learner's L1 and L2. This wider awareness helps to place both in context. In addition to objective knowledge, intercultural awareness covers awareness of how each community appears from the perspective of the other, often in the form of national stereotypes.

Intercultural skills and know-how include:

- the ability to bring the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other;
- cultural sensitivity and the ability to identify and use a variety of strategies for contact with those from other cultures;
- the capacity to fulfil the role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations;
- the ability to overcome stereotyped relationships.

'Existential' competence (savoir être)

The communicative activity of users/learners is affected not only by their knowledge, understanding and skills, but also by selfhood factors connected with their individual personalities, characterised by the attitudes, motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles and personality types which contribute to their personal identity. (…..)
Attitudes and personality factors greatly affect not only the language users'/learners' roles in communicative acts but also their ability to learn. The development of an 'intercultural personality' involving both attitudes and awareness is seen by many as an important educational goal in its own right. Important ethical and pedagogic issues are raised, such as:
- the extent to which personality development can be an explicit educational objective;
- how cultural relativism is to be reconciled with ethical and moral integrity;
- which personality factors (a) facilitate (b) impede foreign or second language learning and acquisition;
how learners can be helped to exploit strengths and overcome weaknesses;
- how the diversity of personalities can be reconciled with the constraints imposed on and by educational systems.

Ability to learn (savoir apprendre)

In its most general sense, *savoir apprendre* is the ability to observe and participate in new experiences and to incorporate new knowledge into existing knowledge, modifying the latter where necessary. Language learning abilities are developed in the course of the experience of learning. They enable the learner to deal more effectively and independently with new language learning challenges, to see what options exist and to make better use of opportunities. Ability to learn has several components, such as language and communication awareness; general phonetic skills; study skills; and heuristic skills. (…..)
Heuristic skills include:
- the ability of the learner to come to terms with new experience (new language, new people, new ways of behaving, etc.) and to bring other competences to bear (e.g. by observing, grasping the significance of what is observed, analysing, inferencing, memorising, etc.) in the specific learning situation
- the ability of the learner (particularly in using target language reference sources) to find, understand and if necessary convey new information;
- the ability to use new technologies (e.g. by searching for information in databases, hypertexts, etc.).